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UNCLAS KUALA LUMPUR 000794

SIPDIS

FOR EAP/PD AND EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: ENGAGING MALAYSIAN MUSLIMS DURING RAMADAN

1. (U) SUMMARY. The Ambassador and Embassy officers actively engaged Malaysians during the fasting month of Ramadan, using those opportunities to amplify on President Obama's Cairo speech which was well received in Malaysia. The Ambassador hosted a series of four well-attended iftars for Mission contacts from all walks of Malaysian society. Mission staff also engaged students and academics across the country via face-to-face encounters as well as virtual encounters utilizing new media and social networking sites on the Internet. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) The Ambassador hosted a series of four Ramadan iftar dinners at his residence. Mission NGO and civil society contacts, senior government officials and foreign policy opinion leaders, U.S. Government program exchange alumni, senior academics, and economic/business contacts made their way through heavy KL rush-hour traffic to the Ambassador's downtown residence over a series of four evenings to break their fast at the sounding of the Azan. Prominent Muslims and representatives of key Muslim organizations such as Sisters in Islam and Jemaah Islah Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Reform Movement) also attended.

3. (U) At the iftars in his welcoming remarks, the Ambassador reiterated his desire to advance relations between Malaysia and the U.S. on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interest. Some guests afterwards expressed not only their pleasant surprise that the USG would host such an event but also their deep appreciation for the Ambassadors kind hospitality during this special time for Muslims. The IIP publication "Being Muslim in America," an IRC-generated list of related Ramadan resources, as well as a personal greeting card from the Ambassador were distributed to all guests. IIP Ramadan videos from America.gov were prominently displayed on a big screen television at the receptions.

4. (U) Ramadan also provided an opportunity to further engage Malaysian Muslims in dialogue in a variety of settings. Topics discussed included the ideas in President Obama's historic Cairo Speech and opportunities for further engagement and partnership to address global issues including climate change, non-proliferation, and women's empowerment. Visiting Congressional staffer Dennis Halpin met with 15 professors and graduate students on the eve of Ramadan to get a sense of shifting Malaysian Muslim perceptions of the US. Public Diplomacy officers met with students at one of Malaysia's American Corners located in the predominately Muslim state of Terengganu and attended several iftar events with Muslim education leaders. Our request for "a new beginning," greater engagement and partnership were well-received, with deep interest expressed in the area of international education cooperation.

5. (U) While the President's Eid-ul-Fitr message received widespread coverage in the traditional Bahasa Malaysia and English-language print media, the Mission's Website, Facebook and the Ambassador's blog were other channels to further communicate bilingual Ramadan greetings from the President and Secretary and to share iftar photos with wider audiences.

KEITH